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AUTHOR Burton, Billie H.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a preadmission orientation program for older nontraditional students at Murray State University, Kentucky. Included is a description of the university, a description of the orientation for traditional-age freshmen and an explanation of why this program was not appropriate for adult freshmen. A step-by-step description of the planning for the orientation is given, along with sample forms and letters, an agenda and explanation of the day's activities, and cost figures for the orientation. Participants' suggestions for improving future orientations are also discussed. (JAC)

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PREADMISSION DAY FOR OLDER, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Billie H. Burton
Murray State University

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PREADMISSION DAY FOR OLDER,

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

The purpose of this program is to describe how the Counseling and Testing Center of Murray State University sponsored a preadmission orientation session for older non-traditional students. Included in the presentation will be a description of our University, a description of the orientation for traditional age freshmen, an explanation of why this program was not appropriate for adult freshmen, the planning of the orientation, agenda and explanation of the day, cost of the orientation, and suggestions of changes I would make for the next year.

Murray State University is a four-year, state supported, regional university. We have a graduate and undergraduate population of 8,350 students. Approximately 10% of these are non-traditional students over the age of 23. The university is located in southwestern Kentucky, 9 miles from Tennessee, two hour from Nashville, and 6 hours from Louisville, KY. The town of Murray is small, having a population of 17,000. Within the University are 80 academic programs, 35 departments, and 6 colleges with a faculty of 350.

For the past 8 years, the Office of Student Development has offered a successful and excellent Summer Orientation for incoming freshmen and transfer students. It is based on a program from West Virginia Institute of Technology at Montgomery. There are 4 sessions each summer--one during the week and 3 on weekends. Each session begins at 8 o'clock and ends at noon on the following day. Parents are an integral part of the orientation. They attend some sessions with their sons and daughters, while other sessoins are held just for them. The reason for parental involvement in the orientation is to make the parents feel a vital part of their students' educational experience and to help them understand life at Murray State University.

The format is not just "here's how and when you send your check;" rather, it is entertaining, informal, and informative.

The cost to the student is $20, which includes a dorm room, linens, 3 meals, and materials. Parents are welcome to stay in the dorm for a cost of $3.00. They pay for meals as they eat them.

One of the most helpful elements of the orientation is the work done by the peer counselors. These are 25 of our top students who are enthusiastic and well trained to answer most questions pertaining to academic preadvisement. The entire group of between 350 and 400 is divided into smaller groups of 15 - 25, and a peer counselor is assigned to each group. The counselor stays with that group for the duration of the orientation.

What takes place during the orientation? There are several social events in addition to "spirit" sessions (pep talks by the President and the football coach). Students are introduced to the deans of the college in which they are interested and informed about campus organizations. They are pre-advised by the peer counselors, then they meet with a faculty member, plan a schedule, and register for the Fall semester. Parents are told about the services provided for students through the Office of Student Development.

Much of this orientation is not appropriate for an adult freshman or transfer student , and very few of them attend the orientation sessions. Yet they are in need of an orientation tailored to their schedules, and they do benefit from the informational topics and the opportunity to pre-register.

The following portion of this presentation will outline in detail the steps followed in planning the orientation.

1. First week of May--set date and reserved room in the University Center.
2. Second week of May--obtained computer list of names of all students over the age of 23 who had been admitted for the Fall term. The list included first time freshmen, transfer students and readmissions.

Arranged to have computer terminals available to register the students on the day of the orientation.

3. End of May--mailed letters announcing the orientation.
4. June--enlisted the services of representatives of other student development offices (health, parking, financial aid, Learning Center) to speak at the orientation.

Met with the best peer counselor from the traditional orientation to learn what is involved in academic pre-advising.

Obtained a second computer list and mailed letters to names on that list. Used a different color of paper to keep separate.

A list was kept of those who indicated that they would attend. Each person was asked to specify a major or state that he/she would prefer to be advised by an advisor from the Center for Undeclared Majors. We contacted a faculty member from each major represented and asked him/her to be present on the afternoon of the orientation to help the student select classes for the fall.

Two weeks prior to the orientation--confirmation letters were sent to those who had indicated they were attending. The letters included schedules of fall classes, campus maps, and suggestions for parking near the University Center.

Met with the four women who were to serve as peer counselors. The group of 30 who had registered to attend was divided into 5 groups of 6. The counselors and I planned and refined our agenda for the day.

Advisement folders were prepared for each of the participants. These included ACT scores, Trial Schedule Forms, and transcripts.

Folders were prepared for them to keep. These included lists of academic programs and campus organizations, the student handbook, the catalog, and an agenda for the day.

One week prior to the orientation--reserved 2 mini-busses for campus tours.

Arranged with Food Services for coffee and doughnuts.

Day before the orientation--placed signs in the University Center giving directions to the room where the orientation was being held.

The morning portion of the orientation began with an introduction of the personnel who were assisting. We then had a small group get acquainted activity. This was followed by the brief presentations of the representatives of the other student development offices. We asked each speaker to limit his/her remarks to 5-10 minutes and remain with us during the break so that participants could ask questions then. After the break, we did academic pre-advisement in small groups and covered the following topics: how to register, how to read the schedule of classes, how to use catalog, the concept of credit hours, developmental classes, how to change advisors and/or majors, and how to drop/add. These activities were followed by a bus tour of the campus. Lunch was dutch treat in the University Center.

After lunch we returned to the same room. Faculty members were there to meet with the students and assist them with selecting fall classes. As their schedules were completed, students were driven to the computer terminal which is housed across campus. One of our peer counselors was at the computer site to serve as a trouble shooter. After registering, the students went across the hall to have their I.D.'s made. These I.D.'s were held by the University and included in their packets. Packets are picked up after fees are paid during the late registration and the first week of classes.

A copy of our budget has been included. The total cost to our office was $56.00. The largest portion of that amount was paid to a counselor from the traditional orientation who worked with us. The only cost for participants was their lunch.

The first orientation was a learning experience. Overall, the participants' evaluations were very positive. Although I was pleased with the session, there are a few changes I will make. I plan to schedule the orientation later in the summer. The date I chose last summer (July 23) was one week following four orientations for traditional age students. Many freshman level classes were closed. If I hold my orientation just prior to fall registration (2 days before classes begin) new sections of classes will be open. Another change I will make is to have one specific place where we can all eat together. As it was, we had lunch in the University Center Snack Bar, but we were not together, and I noticed a few people eating alone. Also, I would begin the day one half hour earlier so that I will not feel so rushed. One of the students mentioned on his evaluation that he would have liked a diagram of the University Center with his confirmation letter, and I intend to do this. I would like to have a student worker assigned to me for the entire day to handle unexpected details. An example of such a detail would be to contact early in the day any advisor whose advisee does not attend. And finally, I would separate transfer students and freshmen in the small groups as they have different kinds of questions and needs.

BUDGET FOR RETURNING STUDENT ORIENTATION

July 23, 1981

ITEM	AMOUNT
Copy Center	$ 5.00
Honorarium to Loretta Wagner	30.00
Food Service	15.00
Automotive Shop for tour busses	6.00 (est.)
TOTAL	$ 56.00